

Interview With Reporters Aboard Air Force One April 8, 2005

Pope John Paul II's Funeral

The President. Listen, were you there in person?

Q. Yes.

The President. One, I'm really glad I came. There was never any question I would come. Last night we hosted a reception at the Embassy for many of the leaders of the Catholic Church at home, and they were very grateful that I came and Laura came and Dad came and President Clinton came and Condi came as well as others. And I told them, to a person, that it's such an honor to represent our country at a ceremony honoring a truly great man who is and will always be a great historical figure.

I knew the ceremony today would be majestic, but I didn't realize how moved I would be by the service, itself, by the beautiful music. I was struck—as an aside—struck by the fact that the sound was so clear in this huge facility. It was as if we were inside the cathedral listening, and the voices were so pure. I thought the homily was really good. We were given an English version, fortunately—if you haven't read it, maybe you've seen it? Yes. Beautiful. Beautiful. Beautifully done.

I was struck by the response of the crowd. And I think it's interesting to note the moments where the crowd responded. One in particular is when His Eminence spoke to His Holiness's relationship to the young of the world, and there was a great outpouring of enthusiasm for that line. And then I think the thing that struck all our delegation most intensely was the final scene of the plain-looking casket—one of three, by the way, lead, wood, and wood—being carried and held up for the seal to be seen, and then the sun pouring out. This will be one of the highlights of my Presidency, to have been at this great ceremony.

So off we go to home now.

Pope John Paul II's Legacy

Q. Your predecessor suggested that the Pope would leave a mixed legacy, even though he was a great man. Since you differed with him on the war to such a great degree, do you also think it will be a mixed legacy?

The President. I think Pope John Paul II will have a clear legacy of peace, compassion, and a strong legacy of setting a clear moral tone.

Upcoming Meeting With Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon

Q. You're going to see Prime Minister Sharon soon. There's been some talk in Israel that maybe you're not going to raise this issue of this latest settlement expansion. Are you going to do that?

The President. I've raised the issue of settlement expansions publicly. I mean, it was upon the prompting of your question. You bet. What I say publicly, I say privately. And that is, the roadmap has clear obligations on settlements and that we expect the Prime Minister to adhere to those roadmap obligations. And the roadmap has got obligations for the Palestinians. We have a great opportunity—"we," the world, has a great opportunity to help a democracy grow—begin and grow, starting in the Gaza.

The Prime Minister of Israel has decided to pull out of Gaza. As you know, I applauded that decision at the White House, with him standing by my side. And I think now is the time to focus the world's attention on what is possible. And we've already started that process of realizing the possible by having General Ward work with the Palestinians to streamline and coordinate Palestinian security forces so that, upon the withdrawal of Israeli forces from Gaza,

there is a security presence that will protect people.

We've got to do more. We've got to make sure that an economy can flourish there.

Q. So you're going to try to talk him out of this latest settlement expansion he's talking about?

The President. My position is clear, and I will—I stated, obviously, now the second time in a brief period of time, and I will say so privately as well.

I think you need to know what the successful strategy will be. And that is there is more than just security in Gaza. We need to have institution-building, and there needs to be an international effort that encourages and fosters economic vitality so that a government which does emerge in Gaza will be able to better speak to the hopes of those who live in the Gaza. And success in the Gaza will make success on the West Bank easier. And so one of our—I will be talking to the Prime Minister about the need to work with the Palestinian Government, President Abbas, to facilitate success, to enhance success.

Let me make sure I go back to the first answer on His Holiness. I said—I think my answer was, is that—what did I say?

Pope John Paul II's Legacy

Q. I asked if you thought it was a mixed message, and you said, "I think John Paul II will have a clear legacy of peace."

The President. A clear and excellent legacy, if you don't mind adding the word "excellent."

Q. Clear and excellent.

The President. Yes. In other words, a strong legacy. I wanted to make sure there was a proper adjective to the legacy I thought he left behind. It was more than just "clear."

Press Secretary Scott McClellan. You said "strong," too, in that answer.

The President. Okay.

Q. Yes, you said "strong legacy of setting a clear moral tone."

The President. Fine. Okay, good.

Democracy in the Middle East

Q. Getting back to the Middle East for a moment, there have been hopeful signs in the region lately. But some in the region think that some of our allies there, particularly Saudi Arabia and Egypt, still are not doing enough to help foster democracy in their own countries. Do you think they're doing enough, or are you encouraging them to—

The President. We will continue to encourage democracy. But I also have said many times that it is important for those of us who live in a democratic society to remember two things: One, our own road to democracy was a little bumpy; we have a Constitution and a Declaration of Independence but, nevertheless, had slavery for a long period of time, for example. And secondly, that we shouldn't expect others to adapt that which we think—we shouldn't try to impose our democracy on other nations. What we should say is, "We'll work with you to develop a democracy which adapts to your own cultures and your own religions and your own habits."

I'm fully aware that there is work to be done. But I think it's also our job to encourage those nations and, at the same time, recognize that all nations are not starting at the same spot in order to achieve democracy. I mean, Iraq, it's very important for us in Iraq to recognize that we—we transferred sovereignty 10 months ago. Remember we all traveled to NATO—to the NATO summit? And it may seem like an eternity to you all—[laughter]—but 10 months in the greater scheme of things is a short period of time. And nevertheless, during that short period of time, the Iraqis have voted, and today they've announced their Prime Minister. The Government will be up and running, the Government Assembly there, to write a constitution. In other words, things are happening quite rapidly, which is positive.

But nevertheless, there is a certain—there's got to be a certain realism about how fast things can possibly happen, given where different nations have started from.

Now, I will continue to press forward on encouraging democracy and reform in every nation, because I believe that is the ultimate strategy to defeat the terrorists. In the short run, we'll continue to find them and work with nations to find them and share intelligence to find them, bring them to justice. In the long term, the spread of freedom and democracy—democracies reflecting the nature of the people and the history of those countries will mean that generations will more likely grow up in peace.

Pope John Paul II's Funeral

Q. When you sat there surrounded by that incredibly—array of world leaders and looked forward to the kind of spread of democracy you're talking about, is there something about just that assemblage there? Who did you talk to? Who did you see? And did it strike you that this was a remarkable ability to pull together such disparate people?

The President. I was most attentive to the ceremony, itself, and was amazed by the size of the crowd. We came walking out of the grand stairway, and it was a very inspiring sight.

Q. And the flags.

The President. And the flags and the statues and just—yes, the bishops and the archbishops and different leaders of the churches right across the way from me. Of course, the cardinals—you know, a handful of whom I know, have gotten to know quite well and admire greatly, by the way. So that was pretty well my focus there.

When I first got there—when Laura and I first got there, we shook hands with the folks around us. Obviously, Jacques and Madam Chirac were right next door; I spent some time visiting with them. But everybody there was—there wasn't much

chitchat. There was intense focus on the ceremony.

Q. But what it represented, to have that many people—

The President. No, I understand. I believe that is part of the power of Pope John Paul II. And he was such a believer in freedom. I saw Lech Walesa, for example. I was struck by the number of Polish flags that were in the crowd.

You know what was really interesting? There were some signs urging that His Holiness be made a saint.

Q. Now!

The President. “Now,” yes—“*subito*.” You know, I really didn't reflect that much on the politics of the moment during the ceremony. I was more—I thought a lot about Pope John Paul II. I mean, here's a person who has shown that a single individual can make a big difference in history and that, in my judgment, he received his great power and strength from the Almighty.

Q. Just to follow up on that, Mr. President, a couple questions about the Pope. One, I noticed at one point you had your glasses on, and you were following along—I'm not sure if you were looking at the homily at that point or maybe, did you have one of those guides that—

The President. I did. It's hard to follow—my Spanish is not very good—[laughter]—nevertheless, it is decent enough to pick up sounds that then can help me follow the Italian.

Q. Had you ever been to a Latin mass before? I imagine you've been to an English mass.

The President. No, never been to a Latin mass.

Q. The other question was, we never had a chance to—you talked about a lot about what struck you from this ceremony. We never got a chance to talk to you about, by contrast, how you were struck by the wake, if you will, when you went through

the other night. How do the two ceremonies—you know, different kinds of emotions in the two?

The President. I felt—I mean, obviously, we were surrounded by a crowd at the wake, but I felt—when I was kneeling there, I felt—I’m trying to think of the right word—“alone” isn’t the right word, because I was aware of people, but felt much more in touch with a spirit. I really did. I was very much—felt at peace there and was prayerful. And at the other ceremony, it was probably just because of all the sights and sounds and majesty and colors that, you know, I felt more like a spectator than a participant, but more of a spectator.

Q. You knew him personally, I mean, to kneel there and see his body after you’ve met with him so many times and had—I mean, that must have been quite powerful and—

The President. My relationship with Pope John Paul II was a very good relationship. He was such a gentle man, and at the end of his life he made his points to me with his eyes. The last visit, as you know, he was pretty physically—he was struggling, and yet his eyes twinkled, just real clear. Much of the communications was done by paperwork, which—

Q. Did he speak English?

The President. Some, but it was hard to really understand him because he was struggling. That’s why it’s really interesting for people to note that there was a lot of testimony—and in my remarks, I tried to witness that as well—that his struggle at the end of his life and the dignity with which he struggled was a clear example of Christ’s influence in his life.

I was honored to see that firsthand. He’s one of the great vigorous leaders—mountain climber, educator, instructor—who then had to struggle using the very tools that enabled him to be a vigorous teacher, outdoorsman, freedom fighter, and yet, nevertheless, he still could communicate clearly through eyes which were, you know,

crystal clear. And I remember the Castel Gandolfo, when Laura and I went to visit him. And he took us out on the balcony. The Castel overlooks this fantastic lake; it’s a spectacular lake. And he was much more conversant then. I think it might have been my first trip?

Q. It was 2001.

The President. Yes. Right before or after Genoa, the G-8 in Genoa. And he had a sparkle; he really wanted to show us this beautiful setting. I would define Pope John Paul II as a clear thinker who was like a rock. And tides of moral relativism kind of washed around him, but he stood strong as a rock. And that’s why millions—one of the reasons why millions came to admire and love him.

I was asked by some of the leadership of the Church, was I surprised at the turnout? I said, “Not at all, because millions from all religions, millions of Catholics and millions of others admired his strength and his purpose and his moral clarity.”

Q. How did the Pope struggle with his health at the end of his life and his example throughout his life strengthen your own faith?

The President. Well, you know, it is as—clear example of Christ’s influence in a person’s life that he maintained such a kind of hopeful, optimistic, clear point of view amidst struggles—in his case, physical struggles. And that’s—a lot of Christians gain great strength and confidence from seeing His Holiness in the last stages of life.

Q. Do you think that will help you in the months and years ahead, in your own life?

The President. Well, I think all of us get touched in different ways if you’re on a faith journey—we’re all affected differently. But yes, I think my relationship with—and Pope John Paul II’s example will serve—will be a moment in my life that will strengthen my faith and my belief—not just me, more significantly, millions of people whose life he touched. I think we

might have witnessed—I don't know—perhaps the largest funeral in the history of mankind. I'm not sure if that's true or not; somebody said that might be true.

But there's a reason why the largest crowd ever to come and pay homage to a human happened, and it's because of the man's character, his views, his positions, his leadership capacity, his ability to relate to all people, his deep compassion, his love of peace. There's a reason why. Again, I repeat, I was honored to be one of many there, and I know you all were as well.

Besides the pomp and the majesty and the colors, there was a spirit that was an integral part of the ceremony. For me, the spirit was also at the wake, but more personal at the wake. That was a personal moment.

President's Faith

Q. If there was ever a moment where you ever had any doubts in your own faith, what out of the past public things would strengthen your resolve and firm up your relationship with your God?

The President. I think a walk in faith constantly confronts doubt, as faith becomes more mature. And you constantly confront, you know, questions. My faith is strong. The Bible talks about, you've got to constantly stay in touch with the Word of God in order to help you on the walk. But the Lord works in mysterious ways, and during all our life's journeys, we're enabled to see the Lord at work if our eyes are open and our hearts are open. And today—you can analyze, and you can look at the coffin being held, with the sun shining on it, anyway you want. I happen to feel it was a special moment that was part of a special ceremony for a special person. And it helped strengthen my faith. And you can have your faith strengthened on—you can have your faith strengthened when you stand up at a faith-based initiative and see someone standing up and testify to what their love has done to help a child or how a child's life has been helped.

My faith gets strengthened when I went to the school the other day and saw the mentoring relationship between a young professional woman and a young kid who's going to go to the SEED School where there's a 95-percent chance that kid is going to go to college. And that helps strengthen my faith. So there's, you know, ways—whether the moment be majestic or whether the moment be a part of just an average—your average moment in life, you can find ways to strengthen your faith. And it's necessary to do so, in my judgment. There is a—it's called a “walk.” It's not called a “moment” or a “respite”; it's a “walk.” It's a constant maturing of an understanding of a—and today's ceremony, I bet you, for millions of people was a reaffirmation for many and a way to make sure doubts don't seep into your soul.

Pope John Paul II's Successor

Q. Given that, how difficult do you think that it will be finding a successor to fill his shoes?

The President. Look, I'm interested in working with whoever the successor is. And I think that, as Cardinal McCarrick said at the ceremony on Saturday, the day His Holiness died, asked for prayers as he began his journey as one of the electors, as a Cardinal. You know, I'm not going to prejudge the selection process.

Q. Are there any qualities that you're specifically looking for?

The President. I'm not a part of the selection process. I will be a President representing a great nation in dealing with a great institution with which we have diplomatic relations.

Q. It's got to be a tough act to follow, though.

President's Meeting With Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi

Q. Can you tell us a little bit about your dinner with Prime Minister Berlusconi? Did you talk, particularly, on Iraq? Did the

subject come up, in terms of the intelligence officer who was killed by Americans?

The President. Yes, it did come up, and I expressed my regret once again and assured him that the investigation would be conducted in an aboveboard, transparent way.

Q. Did he say it had been a problem for him in keeping the support that there is in Italy for having troops in Iraq?

The President. No, he reaffirmed his commitment to—which he has given in the past—that we’ve got to make sure we complete the mission, that we help Iraqis to fight off the few. He knows what I know, that the sooner that gets done, the sooner our troops will be able to come home.

But he’s also aware that what we don’t want to do is leave prematurely, so that we don’t complete our job. And the new Government is just about to be stood up; we look forward to working with the new Government on a lot of things and a lot of fronts. But on the security front, it’s to make sure we’re in sync with our training schedules, make sure that the chain of command within the military and between the civilian government and the military are strong and capable and will endure.

We’ve been waiting for this new Government so that we can then strategize. And as soon as the Government is sworn in, the appropriate folks, we can get Zal confirmed quickly, get him out there—of course, we have a good, strong Deputy Chief of Mission there now, upon swearing in—of course, I will be in contact with the Prime Minister. I’ve already spoke to the President. And General Casey, as well as the Charge—I mean, the Deputy Chief of Mission will be in touch with; Condi will be touch with her counterpart; Secretary Rumsfeld will be in touch with his counterpart as we strategize as to how to move forward.

As we strategize on tactics, on how to implement the strategy—which is clear—which is, we want to train you and make

you as efficient as possible as quickly as possible, so that all of us can begin to, you know, as I say, bring our troops home with the honor they’ve earned.

Q. Italy is going to pull out 3,000 troops, I think, by the fall. Will you be able to absorb that?

The President. I don’t know why you say that. I’m not sure why you said what you just said.

Q. I thought that was the number of troops Italy had in Iraq, and I—

The President. They’ve got 3,300 now, and you said they’re going to pull 3,000 out by the fall?

Q. Well, I guess—I don’t—

The President. Okay. What I did hear was, is that the Prime Minister wants to work to make sure we complete the mission. But I’m not sure where that came from.

Q. Do you think he’ll leave troops in if, in fact, enough haven’t been trained?

The President. I think we’ll work to complete the training mission of the Iraqis. And it’s important we do it and get it right. The amazing thing is, is that if you really think about what’s happened in the 10-month period, in spite of some very difficult days and in spite of some tragedy, loss of life, this country is—there is a democracy emerging in this country. And it was really kicked off by the huge vote of over 8 million people.

But no, we’ll work with all our coalition, continue to make sure we stay in touch with all our—I had breakfast with Tony Blair this morning, speaking about coalition. You know, I stay in regular contact with the Prime Minister.

Representative Tom DeLay

Q. Can I ask you about Tom DeLay, the statement he made in the wake of the Schiavo case, that judges were out of control and should be held accountable. What did you think about those?

The President. I believe in an independent judiciary. I believe in proper

checks and balances. And we'll continue to put judges on the bench who strictly and faithfully interpret the Constitution.

Foreign and Domestic Priorities/Social Security Reform

Q. Mr. President, I know you're not—you've said—you've often said you're not consumed by polls, but a fair amount has been written lately about your approval ratings, which in some polls are at sort of a low point. Some polls—

The President. Some of them were going up the other day.

Q. Okay. Well, some say that—

The President. You can find them going up, and you can find them going down. [Laughter]

Q. In general, what—

The President. You can pretty much find out what you want in polls, is my point. [Laughter]

Q. What about the theory that your Presidency is moving from one dominated by foreign policy to one of domestic policy? Ironically, now that some of things are settling down in Iraq and Afghanistan and you're facing tough issues like Social Security, it's a little tougher road to hoe. What are your thoughts?

The President. My thoughts are the President has always got to balance foreign policy and domestic policy, and I will—I did so in the first term. As you might remember, we were confronted with a recession, and I felt we needed to reform schools, and at the same time, I had to fight the war on terror. We're continuing to fight the war on terror. The war on terror goes on, and that's the important thing for me to continue to remind our fellow citizens. By the way, we will work to defeat the enemy by, you know, making sure our troops are well framed up, prepared, ready to move quickly. It's part of the transformation process that the Secretary is leading. And to make sure our intelligence services mesh and work closely together, I'm looking forward to getting

John Negroponte confirmed as quickly as possible, so we can deal with this crucial aspect.

But there's also, obviously, a domestic component. There was a domestic component in the first term. There is a domestic component in the second term. I might remind you that at points during the tax debate, I can remember people had declared that tax relief was dead on arrival. Occasionally, somebody would say something that was not very positive about the process, and people would all of a sudden assume that nothing was going to get done. So I'm accustomed to, you know, the process of getting a piece of legislation out. And I'm very optimistic that when it's all said and done, the legislators will understand that the American people recognize there's a problem in Social Security and expect something to be done. And I look forward to being a part of that.

I had laid out a timetable to make it clear to the American people my views about the problems inherent in Social Security. And I think we're making progress. I think slowly but surely, the American people are coming to realize there is a serious problem with Social Security—not if you've retired. And that's the other aspect of making sure we succeed in the Social Security debate, is to make sure seniors know they're going to get their checks. And we've got work to do on that.

Q. Still think it will pass this year?

The President. I certainly hope so, because now is the time to fix the problem. Every year we wait costs billions of dollars more. And I fully realize some people would rather me not be discussing this issue. The job of the President is to set an agenda that deals with problems. And sometimes—sometimes the legislature doesn't want to deal with the problem.

But I'm going to continue to remind all of us in Government that when we see a problem, we have an obligation to do something about it, no matter what some

may think are the short-term political consequences. I happen to believe that not dealing with the problem will create political consequences when the public realizes how serious the problem is. If you don't deal with the problem or you go home and say, "I'm not dealing with the problem," there will be a political consequence.

I've learned that lesson, as a Governor and President, that the people expect and respect people for setting agenda items and staying focused on achieving a solution to the problem. And I've set an agenda. I set an agenda on energy. We need an energy bill. You know, we've been talking about energy for 4 years. Now, I fully realize an energy bill reflects a longer-term strategy. But we need to—we need to do a lot of things.

Eventually what we're going to have to do is change our habits, change the types of automobiles we drive. I believe we will have a zero-emission coal-fired electricity plant. I saw the—when we went to Cleveland—or Columbus, we saw the technology involved with that. But Congress needs to get me an energy bill. And it seems like to me, with the price of gasoline where it is, that ought to be enough this time to cause people to get moving on the bill. But I'll continue to push it.

We need to get a budget. We passed—I put a pretty good budget, a real good budget. It helps cut the budget in half—the deficit in half over a 5-year period of time. Now they need to get their differences worked out and get it to my desk. I'll be a part of that process as well.

And then, eventually, we're going to have this tax relief commission come forward. In other words, I have an obligation to set agenda items. And when I set one, I will continue to work it and remind people that we have a duty to deal with these problems.

I like the debate, by the way, as an aside. I'm enjoying this. I'm enjoying——

Q. Even if a lot of——

The President. —because I feel I got elected for a reason. My nature is such that, if I came to Washington and saw a problem and didn't deal with it, I wouldn't feel very good about myself. I want it to be said that George W. Bush got elected and did what he said he was going to do, for starters.

You covered my campaigns. Every speech, I talked about Social Security. And I started talking about Social Security in the year 2000, because I recognized a problem coming down the road. And it is a serious problem, particularly if you're a younger American. You have no problem if you're receiving a Social Security check. I do not care—and I'm going to say it like you've heard me say it—it doesn't matter what the propagandists say, people are going to get their checks. You might remember the ads that they ran against me when I was running for office that said, "If George W. gets elected, you're not going to get your check." I'm sure you guys analyzed those and realized that upon election, people got their checks, which might say something about those who ran the ads, right? Well, they're saying it again. They're trying to frighten seniors in order to stop people from coming together.

Now, in 2001, something that has lost a little bit of the focus of those covering this issue, I called together the Moynihan Commission, and I think it might be wise for people who analyze this issue to refresh their memory about the Moynihan Commission, because the Moynihan Commission, made up of equally Democrats and Republicans, came up with some interesting ideas to solve this problem.

Q. How deeply have you had to draw down on that political credit that you felt you had?

The President. I think you get—I think you earn capital, you know? I think——

Q. Are you spending any?

The President. I'm spending a lot—every time I go out. [Laughter] But you earn capital by spending capital; that's what the

people expect. We've got trips—I'll be keeping—going out, reminding people that there is a problem.

And one of these days, we'll be able to look back and say, "You know, we were successful convincing the American people there was a problem, and we were successful reminding seniors that you're not going to have your check taken away from you." And then all of a sudden, it becomes a true generational issue, because the grandparents receiving the checks, they're going to start asking, "Now that I'm secure, what are you going to do for my grandkid," because the grandchildren are going to pay an enormous price. You heard those experts sit up there and say that if nothing happens it is likely younger workers are going to have to pay an 18-percent payroll tax.

Now, I was born prior to 1950. But if I were my daughter hearing somebody predict that at some point in time she's paying an 18-percent payroll tax, I'd be suggesting to the old man—me—that I get something done. And that's what we're doing. We're working hard to get it done.

Q. Are you surprised that it's taken this much work, this long—

The President. No.

Q. —to make progress on this, because, you know—

The President. No. And this is a difficult issue. I've heard Members say—I'm not going to tell you who they are nor what party they're from; I wish you hadn't have brought this up. We hear the talk out of Capitol Hill saying, "Oh, darn, I wish the President had just focused only on the budget or maybe the energy bill." There are a lot of people who would rather not talk about this issue. I understand that. Again, I don't think that's part of my job description, avoid issues because it may be politically difficult. I think my job description is, if you see a problem, talk about it and work with members of both political parties to come up with a solution.

And there's beginning to be some talk on Capitol Hill. But I'm not the least bit

surprised, because it is a tough issue for Members, for people who've got, you know, a relatively short-term horizon, 2-year horizon. They're worried about—some of them are worried about elections. Some of them in both the House and the Senate—from both parties, by the way—are thinking longer term. And they're beginning to talk some ideas, and that's constructive.

You know, I remember I was telling President Clinton, I remember watching one of his townhall meetings in Albuquerque, New Mexico, on this very subject. And I thought it was a very impressive presentation. By the way, a lot of the language happens to be pretty close to some of the townhall meetings we've had.

But, no, I'm not surprised people want to avoid this issue.

Travel With Former Presidents Bush and Clinton

Q. What has it been like spending time with the former Presidents for 3 days? That's the longest time—

The President. It's fun. Oh, it's great. You know, we share war stories, you know, a lot of talking, a lot of interesting experiences about different world leaders that we may all have met—or all three of us met, just different experiences that, you know, my dad might have had or President Clinton might have had.

There is a lot of interest, obviously, with former Presidents about, you know, policy, so I had them sit in on our policy briefings this morning with Condi and Steve and the CIA fellow traveling with us—not this morning, yesterday and the day before, on Air Force One. And then yesterday at the Embassy, I wanted to include them in. And you know, we had a—these CIA briefings a lot of time prompt policy discussions, you know, how is this process going. Steve and Condi, now that she's here—both of them were able to bring Dad and President Clinton up to date on our strategy in dealing with a particular issue. It's interesting to

get their points of view about their experiences in particular countries. It was fun. It was really a lot of fun. I was honored they came.

Q. Are you worried about them spending so much time together, those two? [*Laughter*]

The President. Well, you heard my grid-iron speech. [*Laughter*]

Listen, thank you all. Hope you enjoyed the experience as much as I did. Absolutely fascinating.

By the way, I think when you discuss religion—on doubt, there is no doubt in my mind there is a living God and no doubt in my mind that the Lord, Christ, was sent by the Almighty. No doubt in my mind about that. When I'm talking about doubts, I'm talking about the doubts that an individual struggles with in his or her life. That's important for you to make sure you get that part of the dialog correct, if you don't mind.

Q. Thank you.

The President. Got it? Everybody got it correct? All right.

Q. Thank you.

Weekend Plans

Q. What are your plans this weekend?

The President. Like Stretch [Richard Keil, Bloomberg News], I'm on the injured reserve list from running, so I'll be mountain biking. I think Cat McKinnon is going come up from Austin. Oh, yes. And I'll be fishing. I'll be finishing my book, "Peter the Great," by Robert K. Massie. Some of you old-timers have probably already read it. I'm just now—have you read it?

Q. Getting ready for the next Russia trip.

The President. Have you read it?

Q. No.

Q. I like when you said "old-timer," and you looked at Steve [Steve Holland, Reuters]. [*Laughter*]

The President. He probably had read it, and I wasn't going to look at Ann [Ann Compton, ABC News], of course, I'm too polite. [*Laughter*]

We'll have briefings. Condi is coming to spend the night; Hadley will be spending a night there. We'll start briefing the Sharon visit Sunday night. And then we'll obviously greet the Prime Minister and then head off to Fort Hood on Tuesday morning and work on that speech probably Monday evening.

Looking forward to getting back down there again. I may do a little cedar work—depends on how sleepy the crew is.

Q. I'll be fishing, just down the Bosque River.

The President. Really?

Q. Yes. I'm sleeping at the Side Oats Ranch tonight.

The President. Tell them hi. Middle Fork has got some water in it.

Q. They do.

The President. The Middle Fork comes down to my place.

Q. Does it come down to you from his, or goes the other way?

The President. I think it comes down, doesn't it? Yes, I think he's west of me, so it's coming down toward Waco. The Middle Fork feeds into the Brazos.

Consider yourself lucky you get to go down to Texas.

Q. I'm delighted.

The President. You're not grouching about it, are you?

Q. Oh, no, no, no. I'm sorry I missed Easter. I was at home for that.

The President. It may be—I hope—I haven't heard, but it may be that the wildflowers, are they out yet? They say there is going to be a spectacular blue-bonnet season this year; I mean spectacular.

2005 NCAA Women's Basketball Champions Baylor Lady Bears

Q. Is that in honor of the Baylor women's basketball team?

The President. I called, as a matter of fact, on the airplane flying to Rome, I called the coach, Kim Mulkey-Robertson, a fine person. I had met her before when

she brought—you all saw her, at least if you were on the pool, right? Let's see—anyway, she was with the Midway girls softball team when they came out, the national champs softball team. Her daughter is a player on it, and so she came out with the parents. But she was one excited lady. And she did a heck of a job.

Q. Blew them out.

The President. They've got a great team. I'm looking forward to welcoming them to the White House.

NOTE: The interview began at 8:29 a.m. en route from Rome, Italy, to the Bush Ranch in Crawford, TX. In his remarks, the President referred to Lt. Gen. William E. Ward, USA, Senior U.S. Security Coordinator, Department of State; President Mahmoud Abbas (Abu Mazen) of the Palestinian Authority; Prime Minister Ibrahim al-Jafari and President Jalal Talabani of the Iraqi Transi-

tional Government; President Jacques Chirac of France and his wife, Bernadette; former President Lech Walesa of Poland; Theodore E. Cardinal McCarrick, Archbishop of Washington; U.S. Ambassador to Afghanistan Zalmay Khalilzad, nominee to be U.S. Ambassador to Iraq; James Jeffrey, Deputy Chief of Mission, U.S. Embassy in Iraq; Gen. George W. Casey, Jr., USA, commanding general, Multi-National Force—Iraq; Prime Minister Tony Blair of the United Kingdom; John D. Negroponte, nominee to be Director of National Intelligence; National Security Adviser Stephen J. Hadley; and Kim Mulkey-Robertson, head coach, Baylor University's women's basketball team. He also referred to the President's Advisory Panel on Federal Tax Reform and the President's Commission to Strengthen Social Security (Moynihan Commission). A tape was not available for verification of the content of this interview.

The President's Radio Address *April 9, 2005*

Good morning. This week I have been in Rome to attend the funeral mass of Pope John Paul II. The ceremonies were a powerful and moving reminder of the profound impact this Pope had on our world. And on behalf of America, Laura and I were honored to pay tribute to this good and holy man.

During nearly three decades on the Chair of Saint Peter, this Pope brought the gospel's message of hope and love and freedom to the far corners of the Earth. And over this past week, millions of people across the world returned the Pope's gift with a tremendous outpouring of affection that transcended differences of nationality, language, and religion.

The call to freedom that defined his papacy was forged in the experiences of Pope

John Paul's own life. He came to manhood during the Nazi occupation of his beloved Poland, when he eluded the Gestapo to attend an underground seminary. Later, when he was named Poland's youngest bishop, he came face to face with the other great totalitarianism of the 20th century, communism. And soon he taught the communist rulers in Warsaw and Moscow that moral truth had legions of its own and a force greater than their armies and secret police.

That moral conviction gave the man from Krakow a confidence that inspired millions. In 1978, when he looked out at the crowd in front of Saint Peter's as their new Pope, the square rang with his words "Be Not Afraid."